

S T U D Y G U I D E



Face to Face with Jesus

by R.C. Sproul



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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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Introduction

During the life and ministry of Jesus, numerous individuals met Him face to face. As a result, they learned who Jesus was and who they themselves were. Coming face to face with Jesus was never a boring event. It changed lives eternally. This series looks at many such encounters and the varying ways Jesus interacted with those He met. These encounters serve to reveal much about us and much about our Lord. Through studying these meetings we come to know better who we are, who He is, and who we are in Him.

John the Baptist

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

John the Baptist is mentioned early on in the Gospels due to the important role that he played in redemptive history. In his message, John exclaims the only hope for Israel and humanity is in the coming of the kingdom and the work of the Lamb of God. The anticipated atoning sacrificial Lamb has arrived, and John the Baptist is the one to prepare the hearts and minds to receive this good news. In this lesson, Dr. Sproul explains the unique calling of John the Baptist and calls us to learn what John learned as he came face to face with the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Matthew 3; Mark 1:1–11; Luke 3: 1–22

LECTURE OUTLINE

1. John's arrival in redemptive history
 - a. There was a four-hundred-year silence in communication from the Lord (from Malachi to John).
 - b. Four hundred years passed before there was another prophet after Malachi. The voice of prophecy ceased for a significant duration.
 - c. More attention was paid to John than to Jesus because John was more political: he challenged the king's marriage.
 - d. John's announcement of the kingdom of God was newsworthy and controversial.
2. The relationship between Jesus and John
 - a. As blood relatives very close in age, they may have grown up together.
 - b. John was ordained to function as the herald as the kingdom of God, announcing its arrival at this point in history through the Messiah.
 - c. John asserts that he did not know of Jesus before His baptism.

- i. The first meeting between the two was when they were both still in the wombs of their mothers.
 - d. In fact, John acknowledged Jesus' identity when He was still in Mary's womb.
 - i. Before birth, John recognized Jesus as the Son of God.
3. John's controversial baptism
- a. Baptism was performed most often in cases of proselytism.
 - b. When a Gentile wanted to convert to Judaism, he needed to undergo a ritual of ceremonial cleansing (baptism).
 - c. Baptism was used to bring about cleansing of an unclean (or repentant) individual for presentation before the Lord.
 - d. John was requiring Jews to be baptized, implying that there was a need for a national baptism, or a national repentance.
 - i. The Pharisees and Sadducees took this as a gross insult, laying claim to their heritage for righteousness.
 - e. This moment was significant in history.
 - i. It was a *krisis* (Greek), meaning *judgment*.
 - ii. The Messiah was imminent, and the people were not ready.
 - iii. The baptism of John was preparatory for Israel, in order to make them ready for the coming Messiah.
 - iv. Israel needed to be cleansed in preparation for Him.
4. John's proclamation
- a. When questioned, John answered that he was a voice crying in the wilderness, directing attention from himself to Christ, the Lamb of God.
 - b. Immediately he diverts attention from himself, pointing them to the One to come. This One, standing among Israel, is both before John and preferred over John.
 - c. "He must increase, but I must decrease."
 - d. In the words of an African missionary: "out of the dawn . . . into the dusk."
5. John meets Jesus face to face.
- a. "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"
 - b. He references Jesus as the human incarnation of the sacrificial lamb that was the central point of the worship of Old Testament Israel
 - c. John's baptism of Christ serves as the announcement that the kingdom has arrived.
 - d. John beheld the dove descending from heaven, anointing Jesus for His vocation as the Messiah

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. John the Baptist was the first prophet after Malachi, a temporal gap of how many years?
 - a. 200 years
 - b. 400 years
 - c. 600 years
 - d. 60 years
2. Why was John's baptism offensive to the Pharisees?
 - a. Baptism was a completely new phenomenon
 - b. He was not in a position of authority necessary to perform the rite
 - c. John was calling for a national repentance, declaring the Jews unclean
 - d. Baptism was for both Jews and Gentiles
3. What was John's response to the question directed toward him regarding his messiahship?
 - a. He claimed not to know who the Messiah was
 - b. He pointed people to Jesus as the Messiah
 - c. He ignored their false assumptions
 - d. He rebuked them for their idol-worshipping hearts
4. The name "Lamb of God," by which Jesus is referred to by John, is a direct reference to Old Testament worship and the sacrificial system.
 - a. True
 - b. False
5. The dove that descended upon Jesus from heaven affirmed John's vocation as a herald of good news.
 - a. True
 - b. False

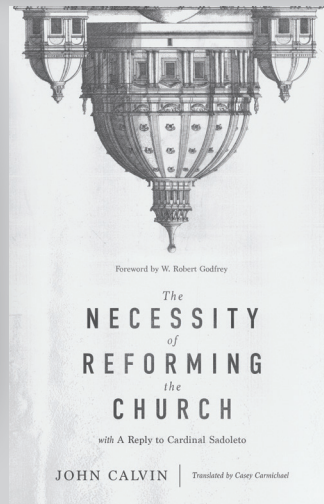
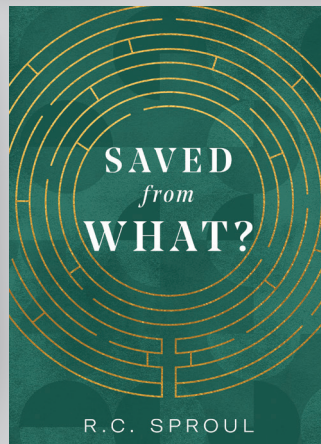
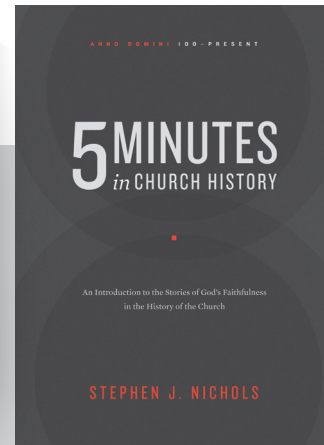
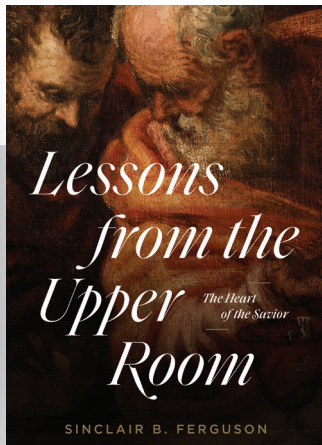
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is John's message in the wilderness viewed as a critical moment in redemptive history?
2. Through the significant duration of the prophetic drought between Malachi and John, Israel must have lost all hope that God's covenant faithfulness would endure due to their covenant unfaithfulness. Explain in what practical ways John's kingdom announcement would have been heard as good news to the Israelites.
3. How does the blood relationship between John and Jesus play a part in the significance of the baptism of Christ?
4. Explain the difference and the link between John's baptism and the baptism of the

New Testament church.

5. In what ways do you live (or neglect to live) as if you were proclaiming the message of John the Baptist? In what ways are we at an advantage from even John as we live on this side of the cross of Christ?

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